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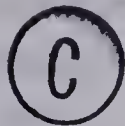
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LAND TENURE AND THE OLD ENGLISH

HEROIC ELEGY

BY



TERRENCE KEOUGH

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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The undersigned certify that they have read,
and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for
acceptance, a thesis entitled Land Tenure and the Old
English Heroic Elegy submitted by Terrence Keough in
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts.

THE HISTORY OF ALABAMA
FROM 1602 TO 1865

THE HISTORY OF ALABAMA FROM 1602 TO 1865, by J. Morgan Kousser, is a comprehensive and authoritative work that covers the entire history of the state. The book is divided into three main parts: the first part covers the period from 1602 to 1763, the second part covers the period from 1763 to 1800, and the third part covers the period from 1800 to 1865. The book is written in a clear and concise style, and it is filled with interesting and detailed information. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of Alabama.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I propose to investigate some of the Old English heroic elegies in order to demonstrate that they are both implicitly and explicitly concerned with problems of land tenure. In Chapter I, I shall discuss the historical background of land tenure in Anglo-Saxon times, concentrating primarily in my treatment on the rise of the þegn and the fall of the gesið in social status. Having provided this background, I shall examine in Chapter II the question of whether the Anglo-Saxon poets employed paronomasia to give their words and phrases a connotative as well as a denotative meaning. In Chapter III, I shall examine some of the explicit land references in poems in which the land element is largely incidental to the overall theme, and determine to what extent paronomasia seems to be employed in them. In Chapters IV and V respectively I shall discuss the land question in The Wife's Lament and The Husband's Message, and in The Wanderer and The Seafarer.

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CHAPTER I

LAND TENURE AND THE FALL OF THE GESID

There are both direct and indirect references to the problem of land distribution in Old English heroic poetry. I am using the term "heroic" to describe those poems which, though they may have Christian content, are not exclusively Christian, and which are, at least to some extent, still sympathetically rooted in the upper-class society of pre-Christian times. The direct references range from that of the pining women in The Wife's Lament over feorres folclondes (47), a rather generalized statement of the geography of a particular problem, to Hrodgar's more subtle warning of the problems of land distribution which will face the hero of Beowulf (1727-1744), to the personal tragedy of the fictive scop's loss of land in Deor (38-41).¹ The indirect references depend on levels of meaning in the vocabulary of certain of the poems. It is my contention that certain words are used in some of the poems in more than one sense, and that there are consequent ironic statements being made in reference to the distribution of land which are not necessarily immediately obvious to a reader a thousand years removed from that society but which would have been seen and understood by those to whom the poems were addressed. These double meanings are most obvious, as one might expect, in The Wanderer, in which the persona is an eardstapa, a "land-walker," but they also appear from time to time in other poems, including The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message, and Deor. I am in no case arguing that these words do not mean what they seem to mean; I am arguing that they often mean more than they seem to mean.

The shorter poems with which I shall be dealing are usually classified as elegies. Their elegiac tone is intimately connected with the evolution of a new society, and with the change of values which this sort of upheaval both demonstrates and demands. In Old English society the change was from the Germanic comitatus system, which was based upon a group of warriors dependent on a chief, to a system in which the warrior per se (gesid) ceased to exist and the retainers of the cyning were

landholders (þegnas) who played an incidental though important role as warriors. The elegiac mood of the poems under consideration seems to depend, at least in part, on a feeling of uneasiness at this change, and there is, even when the Christian content seems to state explicitly otherwise, a consummate undertone of regret that the old order is gone, that the comitatus as it used to be is irretrievably lost.

The comitatus was a thoroughly Germanic organization, a band of retainers grouped around a chief who was a primus inter pares. Its purpose in the tribal society was both to protect and extend the tribal lands and to conduct expeditions against other tribes. These expeditions enhanced its reputation and enriched its coffers with various forms of wealth and treasure. At the highest level, the comitatus was essentially a combined military and administrative elite whose cyning (the word was used in early times for most men of noble birth) received his authority, as Tacitus tells us, on hereditary grounds, and whose "generals" (i.e., chiefs or sub-kings, each with his own comitatus group) owed their authority "less to their military rank than to their example."² It was an institution which, as Little tells us, "could only have been transitional. A set of men who did nothing in time of peace but eat and sleep (Tac. Germ. cap 15) and who were at liberty at the end of a war to take service under any enterprising prince, can only have been tolerated in the infancy of the state."³ But it was also an institution which fired the imaginations of the scop. Its inherent and contradictory attributes of glory and infamy, or companionship and treachery, of victory and defeat, of greed and generosity, are fertile grounds for the literary entertainer, grounds that were well and often tilled right up to the point of the Norman Conquest, long past the time when the comitatus existed in the form described by Tacitus.⁴

At the time the Germania was written, i.e., at the end of the first century, the comitatus seems to have been divorced almost entirely from land problems. The chief apparently held all of the land in his area by grant of the king, land which was apportioned to the peasants of the tribe on a system of rotation, and the retainers none. "These men," Tacitus asserts, "can be far less easily prevailed upon to plough the

soil and wait for the ingathering than to challenge the enemy and take wounds as their reward."⁵ The individual chiefs, who were leaders of comitatus in various areas of the tribal home-land, held their land at the discretion of the principal cyning. They held it, however, at a level once removed from the soil, and their interest in it was principally concerned with the collection of the feorm by which they lived. The grant of seven thousand hides which Hygelac makes to Beowulf upon his return from cleansing Heorot would fall into this category (2194-2196). Beowulf continues to fight along with his own band of retainers in the service of Hygelac. The land he is granted is a means of support, gained as the result of a signal service to his king. His interest in it does not apparently go beyond this point.

Beowulf, however, though concerned with a Germanic society of other times, was written in a new land and for a new age, and one of its major themes seems to bear a special relevance to that age — the changes which took place in the comitatus in a Germanic tribe before the migration. Part I of the poem is, in effect, a description of the comitatus as Tacitus knew it in operation. Beowulf, a chief of noble blood, surrounds himself with a body of loyal retainers and goes forth on an expedition against a fearful monster. His courageous victory is set against what is surely a typical mead-hall background. He is given magnificent gifts for his deeds, returns home, and passes on the wealth he has received to his king, who in his turn, as was the custom, rewards him for his service. All of the essential elements of the comitatus bond are adhered to: the chief is the most courageous of all; the retainers are unflinching in their loyalty and support; the chief reaps the reward of his victory, but turns all he has gained over to his king; and the king, in turn, rewards him for his service. But in Part II of the poem the comitatus bond breaks down: the chief, now king, meets a new enemy with single-handed arrogance, though he is an old man; most of his retainers run away from the fight; the one faithful retainer inherits the reins of command, but he is left with a group of followers who have committed one of the cardinal sins against the system — failure to support their lord and benefactor in battle; disaster seems imminent. It is at least pro-

bable that a theme such as this would be attractive to a major poet (and the author of Beowulf can be nothing else, by any standards) in a time when its message would have some contemporary relevance to the society in which he was writing. Most literary and historical experts would date the poem early in the eighth century, at least in its written form.⁶ "It is not unlikely," says Stenton, "that the idea of giving a permanent form to floating poetic tradition was part of the general intellectual activity which created the Latin literature of Northumbria."⁷ This was a period in which "Individual provinces passed by war from one king to another, the younger members of a dynasty occasionally rose against its head, and the entertainment of exiles was a fertile source of trouble."⁸ It was also a period in which "the traditional loyalty of the retainer towards his chief was weakening, and ... evil men could seize and for a time retain the crown."⁹

Combined with and connected to these somewhat contradictory scholastic and dynastic developments was the problem of the family monastery and the resultant scarcity of land with which the gesidas could be endowed, a problem with which Bede deals at length in a letter to Archbishop Egbert of York in 734.¹⁰ Before attempting an exegesis of some of the poetry in detail to determine its possible relationship with these problems, it is necessary to examine the society of eighth-century Northumbria to try to assess what political, economic, and sociological influences had gathered together to bring about a period in which the old order was changing, and to understand the direction which this change finally took.

At the time of the migration the Anglian society, like that of the other Germanic tribes, seems to have been more or less that which Tacitus describes in the Germania.¹¹ At its head was a king whose power was "neither unlimited nor arbitrary," whose retainers were often of noble blood, and in all cases had to prove their value to the king in battle. The chief of these retainers were under-kings who gathered about them their own comitatus groups and administered and protected the area of the tribal lands which they had been granted. The measure of a king's success was victory in war, because this brought honor to the

tribe and prosperity to its people. The Beowulf poet summarizes the career of a traditionally successful king at the beginning of the poem:

Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,
 monegum maegþum meodosetla ofteah,
 egsode eorlas, syððan aereſt weard
 feaſceaf funden; he þaes frofre gebad,
 weox under wolcnum weardmyndum þah,
 oð þaet him aeghwylc ymbsittendra
 ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
 gomban gyldan; þaet waes god cyning!

(4-11)

[Often Scyld Scefing took mead-benches away from troops of warriors, from many peoples. He terrified the nobles, after he was found helpless. He met with consolation for that, prospered under the heavens, thrived in honor, until each of those who dwelt round about, over the whale's road, had to obey him and pay him tribute. He was a good king!]

It is difficult to be certain about the structure of the society outside the comitatus because the literary and historical evidence is overwhelmingly concerned with events of central significance, and it is naturally around the leaders that these events occurred. It is possible, nevertheless, to make a simplified breakdown of the society as a whole. At its centre was the royal comitatus with the king at its head. Around him were grouped a number of retainers who were sub-kings and chiefs. These retainers, who were originally only gesidas, by the eighth century were for the most part þegnas, a development I shall examine in more detail later. Each of these retainers of the king had his own comitatus group. The next level in the hierarchy consisted of the geneatas, a word which also means "companions," implying, as Stenton points out, "that the origin of the class lies in the lord's household."¹² These men formed a sort of peasant "aristocracy," peasants who also had some of the characteristics of the mounted retainer, and their lands seem to have been granted to them directly by the king rather than by one of the sub-kings.¹³ They developed into the radmen of the later middle ages. At a level below the geneatas were the ceorlas, who were the

mass of free peasants who made up the main body of the migrations. These men were directly concerned with the land, and it was from the land that they derived their sustenance and paid their taxes. They provided from their numbers the masses of foot-soldiers in time of war. At the bottom of the social classes were the þeowas, or slaves.

The change in Anglo-Saxon society with which I am primarily concerned is not one which affected this overall hierarchy so much as the relationship within the comitatus itself. There are two predominating factors which led to this change, a change which saw the warrior of the king become a warrior/farmer, and finally, as demonstrated by the late poem, The Battle of Maldon, a farmer/warrior. The first of these factors is the introduction of Christian values, which encouraged a land-based society in a tightly organized diocesan framework, and discouraged the constant forays which made the comitatus economically and psychologically viable. The second was a progressive worsening of the ratio of gold to population. Land had always been one of the commodities the king used to show his indebtedness to his retainers, but "as the supplies of gold declined [in the seventh and eighth centuries] it tended to become the regular means of rewarding the faithful follower."¹⁴ The result of these two factors was that the retainer's relationship with his lord became a territorial rather than a personal one.

But the molding of a new king/retainer relationship was a slow process which took the better part of four hundred years, from about 600 to 1000, to happen, and the transition was a difficult and complex one. The transition began very early, and the most obvious manifestation of it is the decline in importance and final disappearance of the gesid̃, and the parallel rise of the þegn. The þegn at the time of the migration seems already to have been more than a servant, though he does not come into his own until the rise of the greater kingdoms.¹⁵ The word is used only once in Beowulf in reference to a servant (494); in all other instances it is synonymous with gesid̃. It is interesting to note that the number of occurrences of þegn (25) is about three times as many as that of gesid̃ (8), ignoring compounds, which further widen the ratio. This imbalance might be explained away in terms of alliterative needs, though it is un-

likely that a poet of this magnitude would have problems of that sort, and his either-or usage would suggest the terms were synonymous at that time. They may, in fact, have been synonymous, but his obvious preference of one over the other seems to point to the current usage and the social background that underlined that usage. The gesid was on his way out as a retainer of the king; the pegn was definitely in the ascendancy.

Little has pointed out that the gesidas of Bede's time have already ceased to be the comites of Tacitus. Each of his comes is "in every case, except one, incidentally proved to be a landowner living on his own estate" ... and "when Bede uses comites to signify the members of the old comitatus, the Anglo-Saxon version carefully avoids the technical term gesidas, and substitutes the neutral word geferan."¹⁶ A gesid was not a landowner, by definition; a gesid was at best a landholder. His function was that of warrior. Land for him was a gift from his lord, and it was always laenland, a means of support which enabled him to equip himself for the fight.

The pegn was always in some sense the personal attendant of his lord. At the time of the migration the pegn was a servant in the king's household.¹⁷ It is easy to see how this relationship in time developed into one of confidence and dependence at the highest level. The gesid, on the other hand, was only a warrior. As the heroic age passed into the feudal age and the business of government became more complex, the gesid somehow failed to adjust to a new world. By the ninth century the very word had fallen into disuse as a term to describe the companions of a leader, and had been replaced by the word pegn. Jolliffe is quite specific in tying this demise of the gesid to the general question of land tenure. "The fact that the gesiths as a class faded out of history from the eighth century onwards is amply explained by their failure to establish themselves in an hereditary grasp upon the soil."¹⁸

It is quite probable that pegnas acquired land in earlier times without much disapproval from the warrior gesidas. One needed, after all, only five hides to be a pegn. The following evidence is late, but the requirements put forth are obviously rooted in long-standing custom:

And gif ceorl gepeah, þæt he hæfde,
 fullice fif hida agenes landes, cirican
 and kycenan, bell-hus and burhgeatsetl
 and sunder-note on cynges healle, þonne
 waes he þononford þegen-rihtes weorð.

(Ranks, 2)¹⁹

[And if a ceorl received, so that he possessed, fully five hides of his own land, a church and a kitchen, a bell-house and a town-gate-seat (i.e., where the tenure courts were held), and special service in the king's hall, then he was thenceforth warranted a thegn's rights.]

The traditional reward to a gesid was probably much greater.²⁰ Land had been given to them, up to the end of the seventh century at least, for a very practical purpose, to reward them for military service and to equip them for future military needs. All of this land in early times no doubt was held at the lord's pleasure, but by the late eighth century the þegn held his land in bocriht, whereas the gesid did not. The gesid continued to hold his land as laenland, "loaned-land," and the lord could rescind his rights at any time. It is this sort of grant that Hygelac makes to Beowulf on his return from Heorot (2194-2196).²¹ The land he receives had been his father's, it was lond gecynde, / eard eðelriht, "inherited land, / the rights to the ancestral domain," but it was not merely passed on to him; he had to earn it. He had, as well, to continue to be deserving of it. He points this fact out to his retainers before his final battle with the dragon, a reminder which, in the circumstances is highly ironical:

Ic him þa maðmas, þe he me sealde,
 geald aet guðe, swa me gifede waes,
 leohtan swearde; he me lond forgeaf,
 eard eðelwyn. (2490-2493)

[I paid back the wealth which he had given me with my gleaming sword in battle. He gave me land, the joy of the ancestral domain.]

Beowulf's followers, with the exception of Wiglaf, do not pay him back by their continued service to him. They run away. Wiglaf is in the process of joining them when he gemunde ða ða are, þe he him aer forgeaf (2606), "remembered then the estates which he had formerly given him," and it is this memory which convinces him that he must return to his leader's side. It is also principally in terms of land that Wiglaf upbraids and outlaws

the unfaithful retainers when they later return to the scene of battle:

Nu sceal sincþego ond swyrd gifu,
eall eðelwyn eowrum cynne,
lufen alicgean; londrihtes mot
þære maegburge monna aeghwylc
idel hweorfan, syððan aedelingas
feorran gefricgean fleam owerne,
domleasan daed.

(2884-2890)

[Now shall the receiving of treasure and gifts of swords, all joy of land-ownership, of comfort, cease among your kin; each of the men of your kinsmen must go about deprived of land-right after nobles far and near hear of your flight, unjust deed.]

So the grant of land by a king to his retainers was a tenuous thing which depended not only on past service but also on continuing loyalty.

This system of granting land at the gesid level depended on two things, on the stability of the comitatus as an organ of government and on the king's enjoying an absolute right over the distribution of land. Neither of these contingencies was present in eighth-century Northumbria. The situation was one in which the country was in a general decline politically, and there is some reason to believe that this decline was due, at least in part, to problems over land.

Bede, in the letter to Archbishop Egbert mentioned above, is basically concerned with land problems and their effect on the stability of the realm. Egbert, a former pupil of Bede's and brother of the king, Eadberht, was in a good position to do something about the situation. The problem was rooted in the growth of spurious monasteries. Bede's disgust at the situation is obvious:

There are innumerable places, as we all know, allowed the name of monasteries by a most foolish manner of speaking, but having nothing at all of the monastic way of life; some of which I would wish to be transformed by synodal authority from wanton living to chastity, from vanity to truth, from over-indulgence of the belly and from gluttony to continence and piety of heart.²²

This phenomenon arose out of the granting of land in ius perpetuum

only to the Church. Since it was obviously more advantageous for a layman to have complete control over his land and especially to be able to control the rights of alienation of that land, the practice grew of promising to use the land for monastic purposes (i.e., by superficially turning the family into a monastic community). The intention of the king or under-king who granted the land was at best religious²³ — he would, in Christian terms, increase his heavenly property by doing so — but the effect, when this practice became widespread, was disastrous both religiously and politically. The Church was weakened because these monasteries were a source of scandal which was outside of episcopal control, though because of the type of institution they pretended to be, they were looked upon as part of the Christian community. The state was weakened for two reasons: first, the lands granted in ius ecclesiasticum were not subject to at least some of the traditional taxes; and second, the lands granted were those which were used traditionally to settle and reward the gesidas.

In the early days of the Roman mission a means had to be found by which the Church could be supported. The only practicable source of revenue was that derived from land. Thus we find the earliest English laws, those of Aethelberht of Kent, are concerned initially with the safeguarding of Church property:

Godes feoh 7 ciricean XII gylde.
 Biscopas feoh XI gylde. Preostas
 feoh IX gylde. Diaconas feoh VI
 gylde. Clerocas feoh III gylde.
 Ciricfid II gylde. Maethl friþ
 II gylde. ²⁴

[(Theft of) God's property, and the Church's shall be compensated twelve fold; a bishop's property eleven fold; a priest's property nine fold; a deacon's property six fold; a clerk's property three fold. Breach of the peace shall be compensated doubly when it affects a church or a meeting place.]

A century later, Wihtred of Kent (c. 695) begins his code with the provision that Cirice an freolsdome gafola, "The Church shall enjoy immunity from taxation."²⁵ The first of these laws establishes the fact that the Church had property from the earliest days. The second, a far more important development in terms of eighth-century Northumbria, estab-

lishes a trend which spread throughout the land, and which led to the unsettling of the balance between Church and state in regard to revenues and the destruction of the traditional system of land tenure within the comitatus.

Land, like any other commodity, is obviously limited. It is also, unlike many other possessions, money and armor, for example, difficult to establish rights over in terms of exact location and extent. The traditional Germanic custom of rotating land at the peasant level each year within a given kinship group²⁶ had the advantages which accrue from such a system, soil conservation and ownership by clan rather than by individual, but it was a system that encouraged dispute. At the time of the Roman invasion of Germanic tribal areas it was in many ways an ideal system because the ordinary German "was a soldier rather than a peasant, but in the end, preoccupied with the responsibilities of an increasingly stable agriculture, he became by degrees more peasant than soldier."²⁷ The situation in England at the time of Augustine's mission was essentially of this balance. The peasants — but not the gesidas — were more farmer/warriors than warrior/farmers. But the joint family holding of land, the concept of common kinship land, did not come to England with the migration: the house and hearth went to the eldest son; gavelkind, the prior right of purchase by the kin, at least in the south, and probably also in the north, was practiced.²⁸ The land was therefore owned in a very real sense at the peasant level.

The Church was, of course, granted land in the same way in which a gesid was granted land; it was given a "superiority" over it rather than actual ownership of it; the land it was given was already occupied. But there was an essential difference in the conditions. The gesid had to continue to earn his right to his superiority; the Church — except, perhaps, by means of prayers for the king²⁹ — did not. It is because of this difference, coupled with the claim of eternal life, that the Church was granted lands in ius perpetuum, and it was in order to protect this right, which was contrary to established Germanic tradition, that the Church introduced the Roman vehicle of proof of the conditions of land ownership, the boc or charter.

This system of granting land by charter was very much at odds with the alod custom of the Germanic tribes, but some attempt at compromise is evidenced by the number of witnesses (witnesses being the basis of the Teutonic form of alienation) which were used on some of the charters.³⁰ The first of the land grants in boc were in many ways "acts of national faith made in the aftermath of the conversion, or in gratitude for some national deliverance."³¹ It is when the acts of faith get out of hand that problems arise. If the Church owns a great deal of land, and that land is proportionately tax free, the state is bound to suffer a substantial loss of revenue, and experience a weakening of its control over the country. It is this situation which seems to be one of the root problems in eighth-century Northumbria.

The bocland had all originally been folcland. There has been a long and very involved argument for the past hundred years over what actually constituted this folkland in Anglo-Saxon England. Present historical opinion is still divided, but a good number of historians seem to concur generally with the theories put forth by Vinogradoff in his classic essay on the subject, written at the turn of the century.³² Folkland, according to him, was an individual holding governed by ancient folkright, and "subject to restrictions which tended to preserve it in the family estate." It was awarded, at the level of the ceorl, absolutely.³³ It was not, however, awarded absolutely to the gesid: to him it was given as laenland. Hroðgar, in looking forward to the celebration which will follow the completion of Heorot, intends to distribute, so the poet tells us, all that God has given him buton folcscare ond feorum gumena (73), "except the folk-share [the land from which the taxes which support the government were gleaned] and the lives of men." It is precisely this sort of distribution — especially if one admits a pun on the word feorum, "lives/taxes" — which was causing troubles in eighth-century Northumbria. This interpretation of Hroðgar's words is further reinforced by his subsequent "sermon" to Beowulf (1724-1734), in which he specifically warns him against the folly of mishandling the granting of land.

The great controversy over the nature of folk-land arises principally from the fact that we do not know enough about it. It is men-

tioned only four times in the whole canon of Old English writings. This fact may seem somewhat strange on initial perusal, but the explanation is probably simply that the customs in its regulation were so well established that nothing really needed to be written down regarding it.³⁴ It was simply, as Stenton points out, "the land from which the king drew food-rents and customary services."³⁵ The one use of the word folcland in literature occurs in The Wife's Lament:

... sy aet him sylfum gelong
eal his worulde wyn, sy ful wide fah
feorres folclondes.

(45-47)

[... on the one hand, all of the world's joy may be his; on the other hand, he may be (ranging) very widely as an outlaw of far folkland.]

The meaning here seems to be the general one of "people's land" or "warrior's land," though the land here is likely the exile's own former holding which he has been forced to abandon. The term occurs once in law (I Edward 2), in reference to fines on those who withhold rights to folkland or bookland.³⁶ It is this law which is cited in arguments for the fact that cases concerning folkland were heard before the local gerefan, whereas cases concerning bookland were heard before the king. It occurs once in a charter (Wassingwell Charter of 858)³⁷ in which Aethelberht, king of Kent, gives a piece of bookland called Wassingwell to his minister (i.e., "thegn"), Wulflaf, in exchange for some folkland at Mersham. It is used in the early ninth-century will of Ealdorman Alfred, who asks King Alfred to let his probably illegitimate son inherit a few hides of folkland.³⁸ This will seems to point to the fact that bookland was only inheritable by legitimate offspring, and that even folkland, which at that time was often "loaned" for two or three generations, was uninheritable except in the legitimate line.

All lands were originally subject to certain taxes. The most important of these (called the trimoda necessitas in fake post-Conquest charters) were the brycg-bot, "bridge tax," the burh-bot, "town defence tax," and the fyrð, "defence-force tax." It is probably these three taxes, which are referred to in Wihtried I, from which the Church was immune, though opinion is divided on this point,³⁹ and it seems unlikely

that Church property was ever entirely free from all of them at any one time. Coupled with these taxes were three other services: the giving of assistance in public works and the repairing of royal halls; the quartering of and giving of sustenance to travellers; and the quartering of and providing of horses, carriages, messengers, followers, and servants to great men travelling through the country.⁴⁰

The freedom from paying any or all of the three main taxes was a major concession, and it is partly because of this that bookland became so desirable. But bookland was preferable to folkland in other ways as well. It gave the power to dispose of the land freely by selling it or giving it away; it gave the right to make a will signifying who was to inherit the land; it entitled its owner both to make and manumit slaves; and it included the right to collect and keep the feorm (i.e., the tributum, "taxes," vectigal, "revenue," pastus, "animal food," and victus, "sustenance").

The fact that only the Church was originally able to receive bookland was, of course, bound to lead to abuse. From about 700 to 775 laymen got bookland by using the family monastery fraud. The principal attractions were the exemption from military service and the right to keep the land in (or out of) the family. This abuse began to diminish after the Council of Gumley (Godmundeslaech) in 749, which was called, according to Eric John, to insist on the "limitation of the existing immunities,"⁴¹ but it was not until Offa's time that the burdens were more or less uniformly applied. The fyrð service became a common burden later than the other two, and all three together were not imposed on Church lands before 775. The first unequivocal lay bookland charter, CS218,⁴² dates from 778. From about this time onward it became common legal practice for laymen to hold land in boc. This change in the law removed one of the main causes of the development of the spurious monastery and opened the way for the establishment of a genuine landed aristocracy.

Although we can date with some precision (within a quarter of a century) the manuscripts of Old English literature, it is virtually impossible on internal evidence to arrive at a date of composition. But on historical evidence it would not be an uneducated guess to place the poems

with which this thesis deals, in their primary written form at least, in the period of the demise of the gesid. The subject matter of the poems, personal and social disruption, and the predominately elegiac tone, would concur with this opinion. If one combines the dominating theme of exile with concern over land problems and the need to amalgamate the Christian values into the society, the resultant picture is very much that given by Bede in his letter to Archbishop Egbert:

Quod enim turpe est dicere, tot sub
nomine monasteriorum loca hi qui mon-
asticae vitae prorsus sunt expertes in
suam ditionem acceperunt, sicut ipsi
melius nostis, ut omnino desit locus,
ubi filii nobilium aut emeritorum
militum possessionem accipere possint:
ideoque vacantes ac sine coniugio,
exacto tempore pubertatis, nullo con-
tinentiae proposito perdurent, atque
hanc ob rem vel patriam suam pro qua
militare debuerant trans mare abeuntes
reliquant; vel maiore scelere atque
impudentia, qui propositum castitatis
non habent, luxuriae ac fornicationi
deserviant, neque ab ipsis sacratis
Deo virginibus obstineant.⁴³

[For — what is indeed disgraceful to tell — those who are totally ignorant of the monastic life have received under their control so many places in the name of monasteries, as you yourself know better than I, that there is a complete lack of places where the sons of nobles or of veteran warriors can receive an estate; and thus, unoccupied and unmarried, though the time of puberty is past, they persist in no intention of continence, and on this account they either leave the country and go across the sea, or else, with even greater sin and shamelessness, they have no intentions of chastity, and abandon themselves to fornication and lechery, and do not even refrain from virgins dedicated to God.]

This description vividly portrays the sort of vacuum that the gesidas found themselves in. It shows them as a body of men who no longer fitted into a changed society. It underlines the central reason for their plight, the fact that land was no longer available for them, land which was essential for their support, and it argues against their resultant way of life, exile and loose-living. The same sort of disruption is also the subject of much of the elegiac poetry, which concerns itself with the individual in a state of deprivation. The poems I am

going to examine in detail have been chosen because they are not patently Christian — for genuine Christianity and elegy are in contradiction with each other — though they may have Christian elements and even tentative and bitter-sweet Christian solutions to the problems facing a man who has become obsolete in the society around him, and because each of them seems to be in some way connected with individuals who are concerned about problems of land tenure.

It seems very likely that it was the gesidas and not the pegnas who had problems with land tenure. The gesidas were men of noble birth in Anglo-Saxon times, and they were brought up in the noble art of war. It was in the capacity of warriors, and in no other way, that they served their king. As Jolliffe has pointed out, there was nothing else for the sons of nobles to be in seventh-century Northumbria but clerics or gesidas.⁴⁴ They did not, like the pegnas, who were landowners by definition,⁴⁵ become administrators. So when the pegnas began to become warriors as well as administrators, the gesidas became superfluous. With the gradual extension of the pegn class, culminating in Alfred's military reorganization in ninth-century Wessex which produced the laess-pegnas and the meduman pegene, who were retainers of the gerefan rather than the king, they pass out of history and are replaced by those who hold book-right on the land. It is my contention that the elegiac poetry which I am going to examine reflects this passing.

CHAPTER II

THE POSSIBILITY OF PARONOMASIA IN O.E. POETRY

Before beginning a consideration of the land elements in individual poems, I propose in this chapter to examine an aspect of Old English poetry that is basic to what I shall have to say, that is, the preponderance of word-play. Much attention has been given to certain types of word-play, the formulaic elements, the compounds and the kennings, for example,¹ but there has been a surprising reticence on the part of critics to examine the poems for possible paronomasia. Until quite recently commentators have been willing to accept only the obvious denotative meaning of words, and have been reluctant to admit more than this except in isolated cases where the context seemed to allow an ironic interpretation.² Their reluctance is rather hard to understand in light of the fact that many of the Old English poems reveal a consummate and conscious artistry which is of the highest level. In his introduction to Beowulf, Klaeber examines this artistry in a discussion of the poem's style, and the list of artistic techniques is impressive: the kenning, compounds, metaphors, similes, litotes, variation, antithesis, anaphora, and polysyndeton.³ But he makes no mention of paronomasia. It would seem rather strange that a poet who possessed so many verbal skills would not have made use of the pun and the double meaning as well. But Klaeber's attitude is the common one, not only in reference to Beowulf, but in reference to criticism of the entire canon of Old English poetry.

Adeline Bartlett has shown (as long ago as 1935) a good deal of annoyance with this attitude:

I believe that poetic detail is almost never accidental and that Anglo-Saxon verse is genuine poetry, written by men who knew what they were doing. It is quite true that Anglo-Saxon verse is full of verbal trickery, echoes, puns of a sort, crisscross patterns of phrasing. And so is Elizabethan poetry full of puns and echoes. Does anyone suppose that it was by accident that Shakespeare wrote "Now is it Rome indeed

and room enough"? ... No, the Elizabethans liked to play with words; and so did the Anglo-Saxons.⁴

She cites a number of instances of word-play in Beowulf, and draws attention to the fact that one of these examples, the pun on mane and mancynne (110) "does not differ much from the examples Bede gives of paronomasia in the Bible."⁵ Neil Isaacs has more recently shown himself in general agreement with this position:

For in oral-formulaic poetry, formulas and themes import a denotative meaning elicited according to the precision with which they are used in the particular context, but over and above that they supply a whole host of connotative meanings evoked from the common store of suggestions, emotional and intellectual, which the particular formulas and themes hold in the hearts and minds of hearers and singers.⁶

Doreen Gillam accepts without comment the fact that Old English poetic words must have a connotative as well as a denotative meaning — surely an obvious fact in terms of any poetry, because poetry derives much of its power and worth from connotation — and examines three Old English words to try to evolve a system of determining connotative meaning on a scientific basis. Her system, however, is too involved to be of much practical use, and it tends to overcomplicate her simple contention that the context is the place to look for connotative meaning.⁷ She does, nevertheless, make a valuable contribution to the question by asserting the fact that connotation is important in Old English poetry.

What can be done with connotative meaning in a critical examination of Old English poetry is amply demonstrated by Joseph Baird in an article which deals with the relationship between the word manscādā (Beowulf, 712, 727) and the position of Grendel in the poem.⁸ He maintains that manscada is a "three level pun" which has the meanings "the wicked-scather, the scather of men, the man-scather," and that these levels of meaning are necessary for our full understanding of Grendel as "both wicked monster and wretched man."⁹ This explication of a single word in all its contextual possibilities helps to explain the fascination

which Grendel holds over the reader.

In my examination of the poems in the following chapters I have based my contention that they are to some extent concerned with land problems on two factors, explicit reference to land as the denotative basis of word-meaning, and implicit reference to land where the denotative meaning of the word may be one thing and what I take to be the connotative meaning another. In some instances I have argued that the connotative meaning is the result of an actual pun — that is, the word which is used is connected by sound but not necessarily by meaning with another word which the context brings to the hearer's mind¹⁰ — in others, that the connotative meaning is an alternative denotative meaning for the word.¹¹ This is a contention that cannot be proved, but if the content allows a series of other possible meanings for words, and this series appears to be related, then the hypothesis of double meanings is at least demonstrable. Besides, if one grants that the average Old English poet has power in handling words skillfully, and that power has been generally agreed upon and amply commented on over the years, then one must accept the likelihood of his having a commensurate love of words. It seems in the circumstances, then, that a love of words which is potently demonstrated in kennings of immeasurable beauty

cwaet, he guðcýning
ofer swanraðe¹² secean wolde,
maerne feoden
(Beowulf, 199-201)

[He said he would look for the warrior king, the glorious prince, over the swan-road.]

in echo-words that are obviously intentional

ytde eotena cyn, ond on ytum slog¹³

[I destroyed the kin of giants, and on the waves slew.]

and in the rhythmic balance of anaphora

Sume wig fornóm,
ferede in forðwege, sumne fugel oþbaer
ofer heanne holm, sumne se hara wulf
deaðe gedaelde, sumne dreorighleor
in eorðscraefe eorl gehyde.

(Wanderer, 80-84)

[A certain one war destroyed, (he was) carried away on the way forth; a certain one a bird carried off over the high sea; a certain one the grey wolf got in death; a certain one a sad-faced man concealed in a grave.] would also demonstrate itself in the use of paronomasia. It is this belief that is central to my examination of the vocabulary of the poems.

CHAPTER III

SOME EXPLICIT BUT INCIDENTAL LAND REFERENCES

The chief of the Anglo-Saxon comitatus is acclaimed in the poetry in terms of his dual function, that of protector of the people (helm, scyld), and that of gift-giver (beaga bryttan, gold-gifa). In his role of protector he ensured, through conquest and defence, that his role of gift-giver could be perpetrated. Spoils were collected, treasure was accumulated, and rewards were given to the deserving from the royal coffers. The chief was, however, also in some respects an "Indian-giver": What the chief gave, the chief could take away again if the deserving, in his eyes, became the undeserving. In this respect, the ring-gold, being portable and exchangeable, was probably much less vulnerable than gifts of land. Armor, which was also portable, appears, however, not to have been exchangeable, at least outside the comitatus — it represented in earlier times the heriot, an obligatory bequest to the king which was made upon the warrior's death.¹ This system ensured that the comitatus did not deplete its supply of armor. The practice of holding all the land in the person of the king, and loaning it out (at a level once removed from the soil) to the gesidas, ensured that the tribal lands were always under governmental control. It also helped to maintain loyalty and discipline within the comitatus, and no doubt engendered a good deal of flattery from those who hoped to share in its distribution. It provided as well a certain amount of insurance for one's old age:

Swa sceal (geong g)uma gode gewyrcean,
fromum feohgiftum on faeder (bea)rme,
þaet hine on ylde eft gewunigen
wilgesipas ... (Beowulf, 20-23)

[In such a way a young man ought to practise liberality, by splendid gifts to the people in his father's territory, so that in his old age dear companions will afterwards stand by him ...]

The practice of giving land in boc upset much of this arrangement, of course, because it removed the land from the king's power and thus weakened his control over the holder of the land. But this practice de-

veloped gradually, and was never universally applied — the king always held folcland — and the poems we are dealing with are in no case directly concerned with bocland. Their concern, whenever land is mentioned, is with the giving, the receiving, and the losing of folcland. In this chapter I intend to examine a number of references to folcland in contexts that suggest the poet is describing the give and take of the system as an incidental part of life in the comitatus. All of these references are concerned with the gaining of land except one, and the tone of the poems examined tends therefore to be only incidentally elegiac when compared with those with which later chapters are principally concerned.

The Fortunes of Men deals with the various fates that may await a child brought into the world by a man and a woman. The first part of the poem is concerned with the fate of those who are unlucky in life (10-57). Death comes to them through violence, hunger, fire or the gallows; they are blinded, exiled, or bring on their own death through unwise boasting. The second part of the poem deals with those who are more fortunate in life (58-98). It is in this section, which relates the joys of the comitatus — success in war, the accumulation of wisdom, the joy of receiving treasure, of the harp and of falconry — that a reference is made to the joy of receiving land:

Sumum wundorgiefe
 þurh goldsmiþe gearwad weorþað;
 ful oft he gehyrdeð ond gehyrsteð wel,
 brytencyninges beorn, and he him brad syleð
 lond to leane.

(72-76)

[For one a wondrous gift is made by the goldsmith's art; very often he hardens and profusely decorates the corslet of the king of Britain, and he gives him broad land on loan.²]

For a service rendered, the king gives folcland to the smith. The pattern is the traditional one, the reward made in the traditional way. The poet is illustrating one of the happier aspects of the comitatus relationship. Note the skillfulness with which the poet uses paronomasia in the phrase brytencyninges beorn (75), which on the primary level means the "king of Britain," but which contains overtones of "king of givers," because of the sound similarity between bryten and brytta, "a giver."

The Fortunes of Men is a poem which belongs to the scop's function as sage. He is making a wise comment on the vicissitudes of life. This is not the case in the second poem we are going to look at. In Widsið, the scop is fulfilling his role as historian. The fictive scop, Widsið (note the possible paronomasia in the name: wid, "wide, extended;" sið, "journey"), travels widely through the great Germanic courts over a period of about three hundred years. In the course of his travels he is given treasure by Eormanric, and when he returns once again to his own lord, Eadgils, he gives the treasure to him. For this loyalty he is rewarded not once, but twice. The first reward is the more important of the two:

þone ic Eadgilse on aeht sealde,
minum hleodryhtne, þa ic to ham bicwom,
leofum to leane, þæs þe he me lond forgeaf,
mines faeder eþel, frea Myrginga.

(93-96)

[Then I gave the property to Eadgils, my protecting lord, when I returned home, a gift to a loved one, because he, the prince of the Myrgings, gave me land, my father's ancestral dwelling place.]

The circumstances of this gift are curiously similar to those in Beowulf when the hero is granted his ancestral land by Hygelac after he presents Hroðgar's treasure to the king, and in which this sort of loyalty is sharply contrasted with the practice of the disloyal retainer:

Hyrde ic þaet þam fraetwum feower mearas
lungre, gelice last weardode,
aeppefealuwe; he him est geteah
meara ond maðma. — Swa sceal maeg don,
nealles inwitnet oðrum bregdon
dyrnum craefte, deað re(ian)
hondgesteallan. Hygelace waes
niða heardum nefa swyðe hold,
ond gehwaeder oðrum hroþra gemyndig. —

(2163-2171)

[I heard that four horses, reddish yellow, every whit alike, came next in order; he gave him possession of steeds and stores; thus must a kinsman do, and not weave a cunning net for another, prepare death for a comrade with secret guile. To Hygelac, stout in fight, his nephew was very loyal, and each was mindful of the other's pleasure.³]

Widsið's second reward is also a piece of land:

ond me þa Ealhild oþerne forgeaf
 dryhtcwen duguþe, dohtor Eadwines.
 Hyre lof lengde geond londa fela,
 þonne ic be songe secgan sceolde,
 hwaer ic under swegl(e) selast wisse
 goldhrodene cwen giefte bryttian.

(97-102)

[And then Ealhild, the daughter of Eadwine, a queen of noble majesty, gave me another. Her praise was spread through many lands, whenever it fell to me to tell in song, where under the sky I best knew a gold-adorned queen bestowing gifts.]

This gift is an interesting one for two reasons: first, it seems to indicate that the early queens had at least the power to loan out some of their own folcland, if not that of the regime; and second, it points to the fact that scop's probably praised the living in direct proportion to how well their benefactors filled their pockets.

The final poem I wish to consider in this section, Deor, is concerned with great tragedies in life and how to overcome them. It combines the scop's function of historian and sage. The explicit land reference is to a losing of his land by the scop:

Ahte ic fela wintra folgað tilne,
 holdne hlaford, oþþaet Heorrenda nu,
 leoðcraeftig monn londryht gefaþ,
 þaet me eorla hleo aer gesealde.

(38-41)

[I had for many years a good office, a trusty lord, until Heorrenda now, one skilled in song, received the landright that the protector of earls formerly had given to me.]

This loss of land is compared to some seemingly far greater tragedies in the legendary past — e.g., the hamstringing of Weland, the rape of Beadohild, the tyranny of Eormanric — so one must assume that this sort of eventuality was a very grave one in the eyes of the Anglo-Saxon élite. And there is no reason why it should be looked upon as anything but grave. Loss of land meant loss of favor, and when one's livelihood depended on the generosity of one's lord, to be out of his favor was a very serious situation.

There is also in this poem a hint of general dissatisfaction with the practice of granting land on a temporary basis. The poet tells us:

Maeg þonne gefencan, þaet geond þas woruld
 witig dryhten wendeþ geneahhe,
 eorle monegum are gesceawað,
 wislicne blaed, sumum weana dæl.

(31-34)

[He may then think that throughout the world the wise lord constantly effects change, to many an earl grants honor, a certain prosperity, to some a portion of sorrows.]

These lines are capable of a Christian interpretation, and it is likely that this is intended. But if one examines the vocabulary closely, it will be seen that an ironic comment is probably being made as well. The comparison between the Lord/Christian relationship and the lord/retainer relationship is a commonplace of Old English literature, and that comparison seems to be implicit in these lines. Not only is the word dryhten used in a double sense (note the strong irony in witig), but probably also the word ar, "honor", "mercy", "landed estate."⁴ So that in this passage, on the ironic level, the poet seems to be saying that there is too much changing about in terms of land ownership, and though the result is good for a lot of people, it is rather bad for some others, including, apparently, himself.

One of the most interesting aspects of these three poems is the fact that they deal with land tenure as experienced by people other than warriors, two scopas and a smith. It would be dangerous to draw any definite conclusions from this fact, not only because of the haphazard selection of the poetry that has survived, but also because of the difficulties involved in dating the poems. Besides, specific references of this sort may carry a much more generalized connotation in terms of the whole comitatus than they seem to do. But one thing is certain. The poems are concerned with the distribution of folcland as a reward to the deserving, and the removal of it from the undeserving. The references, however, are brief, and with the possible exception of the one in Deor, they are incidental to the purpose of the poems. It is this fact which distinguishes them from those in the poems which will be discussed in the following chapters, The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message, and The Wanderer, all of which deal with land problems in an essentially thematic way.

CHAPTER IV

THE WIFE'S LAMENT AND THE HUSBAND'S MESSAGE:

THE EXILE AT HOME AND ABROAD

If one sets aside the very perplexing and possibly fragmentary Wulf and Eadwacer, The Wife's Lament holds a most distinctive place in Old English literature as the only non-Christian heroic poem which concerns itself with the personal problems of a woman.¹ The poem begins with a formulaic expression of the woman's miseries, past and present (1-5), continues with the reasons for and result of her present wretchedness (6-41), and concludes with a strangely personalized gnomic expression of her situation (42-53). The traditional critical assessments of the poem agree up to this point. The differences which exist between the interpretations revolve around one or all of the following: first, the identification of each of hlaford (6), leodfruma (8), monnes (11), hlaford (15), mon (27), freat (33), geong mon (42), and frend (47); secondly, the meaning of folgað secan (9); and thirdly, the meaning of morþor hycgendne (20),² and its relationship with blife gebaero (21). It is my contention that these differences are resolvable, and that the key to their resolution lies in the postulation that there are two lords referred to in the poem rather than one, and in the correct interpretation of blife gebaero.

Let us consider, first of all, the question of the identification of hlaford and the various other words in the poem which may or may not refer to the "lord" of line 6. The speaker begins her tale of present woes by telling us that her lord "went hence from the people over the rolling waves," min hlaford gewat heonan of leodum / ofer ypa gelac (6-7). She then tells us that "she suffered grief before dawn with regard to where in the land my first-lord was," haefde ic uhtceare / hwaer min leodfruma londes waere (7-8), and that she then went to seek "a position of service, an office, a condition in life" (folgað, 9). So the picture, so far, seems to be one in which a woman finds her lord gone away (it will be noted that there is no hint of his having been

physically forced to go — he seems to have slipped away before this happened), that his going has given her grief, and that she is now left to look for some sort of protection within her society. The word leod-fruma may refer to the same man as hlaford, let us call him her "husband" for the sake of convenience, or it may refer to the man she goes to for help, probably an "overlord" (leod, "people," fruma, "beginning").³ Perhaps both meanings are intended here, as both are likely in the context.

The problem in this passage lies in where she goes. She uses the expression wineleas wraecca (10) in reference to herself, and this has been almost universally interpreted to mean "friendless exile," and to infer that she has left her home to seek "service" with another lord in another country,⁴ but this interpretation is not necessary. The fact of her lord's exiling himself would at the same time exile her from him, without her having to move an inch. Besides, the word wraecca can also be used with a meaning approaching the modern English "wretch,"⁵ and that meaning would certainly suffice here, as a wretch is always in some sense an exile within his society. So it is my contention that the woman stays in her own country, and that she goes to the chief man there, the hlaford of line 15, for help. He commands her "to take up a piece of land" (herheard niman, 15)⁶ in an area in which she has no loved ones. She remembers her husband's contemplation of violence against a kin who was trying to separate them, and the oaths they vowed together. This memory, coupled with the fact of his exile, leads her to seek vengeance. But her plans are discovered, and as a result, "a certain one" (mon, 27), that is, the hlaford (15) to whom she had gone for help, banishes her to a grove of woods. In this place she grieves about her "absent lord" (fromsiþ frean, 33), that is, her husband, not her overlord, and about her sad and lonely place in life. This brooding leads her to make a gnomic statement which says, in effect, that a young person should always wear a "cheerful countenance" (bliþe gebaero, 44) no matter how cruel and sorrowful are his inner thoughts, because the result of doing so is "all the joy of his world," eal his worulde wyn (46), whereas the result of not doing so is that he will become an outlaw wandering far from his own folklands (sy ful wide fah / feorres folclondes, 46-47). This reflection fits in very

neatly with the woman's situation in the poem, and it is the phrase blife gebaero which provides the key to its relevance both to her husband, who is finally referred to as the freond (47) under the stanhlipe (48), and to herself. In order to appreciate this fully, we must go back to lines 17b-26, where the phrase first occurs, and examine it in relationship to morþor hycgendne (20) and faehðu (26):

Forþon is min hyge geomor,
 ða ic me ful gemaecne monnan funde,
 heardsaelige, hygegeomorne,
 20 mod miþendne, morþor hycgendne,
 bliþe gebaero. Ful oft wit beotedan
 þæt unc ne gedaelde nemne deað ana
 owiht elles; eft is þæt onhworfen,
 is nu [fornumen] swa hit no waere
 25 freondscipe uncer. Sceal ic feor ge neah
 mines felaleofan faehðu dreogan.

[Therefore my mind is sad, since I found a man fully suited to me, cruelly tormented, sad within, concealing the spirit, plotting violent death under a cheerful outer manner. Very often we two vowed that nothing would part us except death alone, nothing else; that is afterwards upset, is taken away so that now it is as if our love never was. I must far and near for my dearly beloved engage in a feud.]

There has been a great deal of critical confusion in regard to the modifiers in lines 19 and 20.⁸ Initially, I was attracted to the idea that they might refer to an unexpressed masculine noun (hyge, for example) which itself would refer to the woman. The basic attraction of such an idea is that it would help to explain the woman's subsequent banishment to the edge of the community. This approach, however, is not only incapable of proof and rather unconvincing, it is also unnecessary if faehðu dreogan (26) is interpreted in the active sense of "engage in a feud" rather than in the passive sense of "experience hostility." Though in terms of motivation for the woman's suffering exile either sense would do, the active sense is obviously the stronger. It becomes quite reasonable, then, to attribute the modifiers in lines 19 and 20 to the husband (in spite of the difficulty some critics have in finding a noun for them, monnen (18) seems to me to serve very well) as a means of explaining the mental attitude that led to his exile, and to attribute the wife's exile to a similar state of mind which leads her to seek vengeance.

The repetition of blife gebaero (21, 44) gives us the clue to the reason for the failure of the plotting of both the husband and the wife. Neither one of them was able to cover up their scheming minds with "a cheerful outermanner." The result, of course, was exile. In her personalized gnomic utterance (42-47a) the wife makes this very clear:

A scyle geong mon wesan geomormod,
heard heortan gepoht, swylce habban sceal
blife gebaero ... (42-44)

[A young person ought to be always serious-minded, cruel thoughts in his heart; as well as this, he must have a cheerful outer manner...]

It is not their plotting that the woman is bewailing. It is the fact that they did not succeed that matters to her, and that is why she dwells on the reason for their failure, their inability to divorce their inner thoughts from their outer manner, rather than on the inadvisability of plotting in itself.

So the poem makes sense if it is read with the following ideas in mind: that there are two lords, the woman's husband, and the overlord of the area; that the woman is given a piece of land when her husband leaves, but that she plots revenge against his kinsmen, who are in some way, responsible for his going, which brings about her exile to the woods at the edge of the community; and that her brooding over the situation is a somewhat confused mixture of the present situation, the recent past, and the further past. Before examining the land question in this poem it will be necessary to sort out these time shifts to determine the steps involved in her fall from landholder to exile. These may be outlined as follows:

Present: lines 1-5: The woman begins her tale of woe with a formulaic expression of grief.

Recent Past: lines 6-10: Her husband goes into exile; she goes to an overlord for help.

Further Past: lines 11-14: Her husband went into exile as a result of the plotting of his kinsmen, who wanted to separate the two of them.

Recent Past: lines 15-21a: The overlord gives her some land, but it is in an area in which she has no friends; she is very upset because she has been separated from a man who was most suitable for her; she puts on a cheerful front, but she inwardly plots a violent course.

Further Past: lines 21b-23a: She and her husband had vowed never to be parted except by death.

Recent Past: line 23b: That vow was afterwards reversed (because he had to leave).

Present: lines 24-26: The relationship they had is now gone, so that it seems as if it never existed, but because of her love, the woman has had to engage in a feud.

Recent Past: lines 27-28: The overlord exiled her to an earth-hole in the woods because of her feuding.

Present: lines 29-32a: She complains bitterly about her place in exile, which appears to be within the fortifications at the edge of the community (bitre burgtunas, "bitter protecting hedge").⁹

Recent Past: lines 32b-33a: She has often felt greatly upset by the fact that she is separated from her husband.

Present: lines 33b-41: Though she has friends on this earth, they have a place to rest, a home to live in,¹⁰ whereas she, because of her longing, her disturbed mind, and her lack of land, is unable to find any rest.

lines 42-47a: She turns to gnomic material in a passage which reflects both her own situation and that of her husband, both of them now bereft of the joy of the land.

lines 47b-53: In this section she gives us a formulaic image of exile, which again has particular significance, followed by a gnomic bewailing of the exile's lot.

There are, then, a number of explicit references to land in The Wife's Lament. The first of these occurs when the woman says:

haefde ic uhtceare
hwaer min leodfruma londes waere

(7-8)

[I had grief before dawn in regards to where in the land my first-lord was]

This use of londes is a good illustration of the breadth of meaning possible in so many of the words that refer to land. It is not likely that a double meaning is intended in this context, and I am certainly not postulating one, but the word does have a much broader meaning here than it usually has, so there may be an intentional overtone containing the

idea of the woman's worry over her present status in terms of the land.

In the next land reference the overlord gives her a londstede (16) in an area in which she has no friends — the land may in fact be that which she and her husband possessed before he left, land which would have been surrounded by members of his kin, who were obviously hostile to her — but she causes trouble in seeking revenge, and the overlord banishes her to the woods on the perimeter of the community. Here, after due reflection, she makes a reference to her husband's own former land-holding, feorres folclondes (47), "far warrior-land," a reference which she ties in with the concept of exile, fah (46), "outlaw," and which she very effectively contrasts with worulde wyn (46), "joy of the world," by which she seems to mean — note he gemon to oft / synlicran wic (51-52), "he remembers too often the joyful house" — the joy of the land.¹¹

There is probably some paronomasia in the section of the poem dealing with the woman's life in her eorðscraefe (28), "earth-hole." The hole itself is a negative thing in terms of earth; it is, in other words, a lack of earth. The word eorðsele, (29) "earth-hall," carries on the negative impression of eorðscraefe because it implies a comparison between the hall of the comitatus and a hole in the ground. The comparison becomes positive as the wife thinks of her friends:

Frynd sind on eorþan,
leofe lifgende, leger weardiað,
þonne ic on uhtan ana gonge
under actreo geond pas eorðscrafu.

(33-36)

[Friends are on earth, loved ones living, who have a resting place, while I before daybreak wander alone under the oaktree around this earth-hole.]

The word leger in Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry normally means "grave," but if we accept along with Krapp and Dobbie that the meaning here is "home,"¹² then on eorþan probably has the additional meaning of "on a piece of land." This interpretation is further enforced by the references to the oak-tree, actreo (28, 36). The word is not only related etymologically to aecer, "field, land," but the tree itself, standing as it does at the town's defences, is a fitting symbol for the forest area beyond the arable land. It is this area that is the wife's; she is out-

side the farmable world of her friends.

It seems quite demonstrable that this poem is concerned with one of the reasons people are dispossessed of their land, and with the fate of their dependents when this dispossession is accompanied by exile. The point of view is interesting because it is through the eyes of the one left behind that the story is told, and not, as is usually the case, through the eyes of the exile himself. The woman has been put in an impossible position by her lord's leaving. She tells us that his kinsmen are responsible for driving them apart, and this means in terms of Germanic social codes that she is bound in honor to seek revenge, even though the consequences of failure are disastrous. With exile a most common lot in Anglo-Saxon times, this situation must have occurred frequently. It seems only natural that a court poet would deal with the problems of those left behind as well as with the modcearig of those who are sent away. It also seems very likely that in most cases these people would be women, as men would be the more common objects of banishment. The Wife's Lament is merely the other side of the coin of the common exile motif. It has been this fact which has led to much speculation about its possible connection with the editorially conveniently titled poem The Husband's Message, which I should like to consider briefly in terms of its land element.

First of all, it will be necessary to consider the question of an actual connection between The Wife's Lament and The Husband's Message.¹³ In the context of this examination, the fact of a relationship other than a thematic one (accidental or intended) is irrelevant. The important thing, and the reason I chose to deal with this poem here, is the fact that The Husband's Message is concerned with a successful solution to the problem of exile, the loss of land, and the consequent separation of loved ones. As I see it, each of these two poems is dealing with a common problem from a related, but different, point of view, in much the same way as The Wanderer and The Seafarer do, and that their connection rests in this generalized area rather than in the particular relationship between two particular separated men and women.

The text of The Husband's Message, like many of the texts in The

Exeter Book, has been damaged, and there are a number of lacunae in areas which are important for a definite understanding of the poem. But in outline the situation is fairly clear. It seems that a messenger arrives from another land with a rune-stave, which will serve as a means of identification, to ask a woman to sail across the sea to rejoin her lover. The messenger gives an account of the background of the separation, and an outline of the present prosperity of his lord. He presents her with the rune-stave, and reminds her of the oaths and love-pledges which the two lovers had formerly vowed.

The connection between the separation of the two lovers and land problems is explicit. In his explication of the reason for his lord's exile, the messenger refers to the time when the man and woman were living together:

Hwaet, þec þonne biddan het se þisne beam
agrof
þaet þu sinchroden sylf gemunde
on gewitlocan wordbeotunga,
þe git on aerdagum oft gespraecon,
þenden git moston on meoduburgum
eard weardigan, an lond bugan,
freondscype fremman.

(13-19)

[Lo, he who this piece of wood inscribed commands that I ask you then, that you, yourself, richly adorned, might remember in your mind-safe words of oaths which you two in former days often spoke, while you two in the mead-cities could occupy a dwelling, inhabit a piece of land, participate in love-ship.]

Because of a feud (faehþo, 19) the man had to leave, and the two of them were no longer able to live together. There is no indication in this poem, as there is in The Wife's Lament (27-28), that the woman is forced to leave her eard, and any speculation in that area would be idle. The importance of the reference to land here is that it underlines the basis of a former domestic joy, a situation which the exiled lover is offering to the woman once again.

he genoh hafad
faedan gold[ē] s [feohgestreona
paet he geon]d elpeode epel healde,
faegre foldan.¹⁴

(35-38)

[He has enough of burnished gold, property-wealth, so that he among foreign people may enjoy the status of a landowner, the fertile earth.]

What he is saying is that he has once again been able to set himself up in a situation in which he can offer domestic happiness to his woman. The implication is, of course, that the exile must in some way retrieve his fortunes if he is to return to a world of wynn, and the solution which is accomplished here is a transplantation of what these two had formerly had to a new comitatus group in a new area. This solution, of course, is only one of many, as we shall see when we examine those offered by The Wanderer and The Seafarer, but the chain of problems which has resulted in the situation of the poem is certainly not unique. The pivot of the problem is exile, and the reason for the exile is some sort of feud. But the examination of exile is not left in the general area of loss of patria; it is bound up with the personal loss of land and the separation of the exiled from his kin, and these personal losses are not only implied, but in this case, as in other cases, specifically referred to.¹⁵ It would appear likely, therefore, even at a time when the comitatus system of organization of upper-class society was still to some extent flourishing, that the joy of living was connected with the possession of land as well as the comradeship of the hall. That the man is calling the woman to participate in the life of this system is explicitly stated in the following passage:

Ne maeg him [on] worulde willa gelimpan
mara on gemyndum, þæs þe he me saegde,
þonne inc geunne alwaldend god
[þaet git] aetsomne siþþan motan
secgum ond gesiþum s[inc brytnian],
maeglede beagas.

(30-35)

[Nor can a desire arise to him in the world greater in the mind, as he said to me, than Almighty God may grant to you two, that you two together may afterwards deal out treasure, studded bracelets, to men and companions.]

It also appears that the gnostic wisdom of lad se þe londes monað, leof se þe mare beodeð, "hateful is he [i.e., a ruler] who lays claim to land, loved is he who gives more,"¹⁶ and the sociological ramifications of this statement in terms of the need of individuals to possess land

to enjoy a happy life, is appreciated by the husband.

These two poems represent, as I have pointed out, two aspects of a common problem. The Wife's Lament pictures the difficulty the woman of the exile must contend with when her man has left, The Husband's Message presents a possible solution to both the problems that the exile encounters and the situation that the woman finds herself in. Land has been shown to be a major factor both in the problem and the solution. I am not contending, however, that these poems are concerned only with land problems, not even that they are concerned principally with land problems, but that they are in some respects making a comment on them. They are, like any poetry worthy of the name, a complex of meanings, depending for their intentions not only on the poet, but also on the reader.¹⁷ It is one of the functions of the reader to discover as much as possible of what is there. It is my contention that the land element in these poems has been hitherto unjustly neglected.

CHAPTER V

THE WANDERER AND THE SEAFARER: PASSIVE AND ACTIVE TRUST IN GOD

Critical approaches to The Wanderer and The Seafarer have, for the most part, had two things in common: they have assumed a thematic relationship between the poems, and they have postulated a structural relationship in terms of imagery, vocabulary, and method of composition. These relationships are, of course, there, and it is very difficult to treat one poem without, at the same time, comparing it to the other. That is part of my justification for examining The Seafarer briefly in this chapter, for the poem is concerned with land tenure only in the most general sense, that is, in terms of the fact that people do live on land. My second reason for discussing this poem lies in the fact that it contains a number of examples of obvious paronomasia. Finally, and more fundamentally, the poem is very much concerned with the break-up of the old comitatus and the condition of the world that has resulted from this break-up, and it offers a solution to the problems that beset society which is essentially different from that offered by The Wanderer, which is concerned with the same problem. Reduced to its simplest terms, the wanderer's advice is to accept the social situation for what it is and wait for the better life that will come after death. The seafarer, on the other hand, demands action, postulating the markedly Christian belief that one must "fight the good fight" here on earth in order to earn not only the praise of men, but also a place of glory in heaven. This difference in approach to a common problem is most positively expressed in the attitudes of the two men toward the sea, which is a central symbol of exile in both poems. Whereas the wanderer finds the sea a dreadful place which he wishes to avoid if at all possible, and remains throughout the poem an eardstapa, "a land-walker," at heart, the seafarer is anxious to accept the rigors of the sea, and he tends to be contemptuous of those who are content with the easy way of life on land. The wanderer, of course, is not one of those who has an easy way of life on land. He is

an exile, forced to wander from place to place, and his condition in life is one which was much dreaded in Anglo-Saxon society. But, unlike the seafarer, he does not turn his exile into something positive. He accepts it, and waits. It is this difference in approach which is central to an understanding of the two poems. The wanderer is rejected by the society, but continues to live within it sundor aet rune; the seafarer rejects the society completely and chooses to live his life on the arduous hwaeles eðel.

The seafarer begins by describing the sufferings he has endured at sea (1-12a). He compares the hard life at sea to the easy life on land (12b-33a), but he nonetheless longs once more to voyage forth (33b-38). His voyages release him from the pressures and worries of the comitatus situation, though at the same time he has to do without the more pleasurable things of the land man, things for which he always has a longing while at sea (39-47). When the summer comes he is eager to journey forth, because life on the land is both dead and transitory (48-67). People die of sickness, old age, or ecghete, and it is irrelevant that they die unless they have performed good deeds against enemies and the devil, so that men and angels will praise them afterwards (68-79). The days of the old comitatus are gone, and the degenerate possess the world through toil and trouble. Old age and death are everywhere, and though a man bury the dead with treasure, it will not help a sinful soul before God (80-102). God is the mighty and fear-inspiring Creator. Those who fear Him humbly receive mercy (103-108). A man must keep a violent mind in check, be trustworthy to men, and lead a pure life. We should decide where our home really is, in heaven, and then make every effort to get there. May God be thanked for honoring us (109-124).

As this summary will indicate, the seafarer is obviously very much in love with the sea, and at the same time, contemptuous of life on the land. He says, first of all, that the landman has such an easy life that he does not know what life is like at sea:

ƿaet se mon ne wat
 ƿe him on foldan faegrost limpeð

(12-13)

Then he says that the landman leads such a good life that he does not believe the hardships of the sea-life:

Forþon him gelyfed lyt, se þe ah lifes wyn
gebiden in burgum, bealosipa hwon,
wlonc ond wingal

(27-29)

[And so he believes little, who has all of life's blessings, who has dwelt in a walled place, proud and wine-merry, who has no knowledge of travel pain.]

The next reference to life on land concerns the competitive spirit within the comitatus. The seafarer tells us that he leaves behind him the proud-spirited man (modwlonc mon, 39), the generous man (þaes god, 40), the brave man (þaes deor, 41), and the others, and with them, the constant rivalry for the lord's favor. He also admits that there is another side of the coin, and he must leave behind the harp, the receiving of rings, and the joy of women as well. He repeats the fact that the man on land does not know the sufferings of the exile:

Paet se beorn ne wat,
esteadig secg, hwaet þa sume dreogað
þe þa wraeclastas widost lecgað

(55-57)

and a few lines later wraps up his earlier remarks by stating that he prefers the joys of the lord (Lord) to this dead life, transitory on land:

Forþon me hatran sind
dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,
laene on lond

(64-66)

The references from this point onward are no longer explicitly contrasted with the sea. He has described the situation on land, he has suggested the alternative life at sea, and he now turns to the more philosophical business of saying that we are all going to die anyway, so we should reject what is essentially a degenerate society and prepare ourselves actively for a better life in the world to come.

There are a number of double meanings in the vocabulary of the poem which reinforce this comparison between the earthly and heavenly worlds. Greenfield points out the "puns" (the word is his) on dream (65,

tions of meaning. Gemonian and monian are the same word used in two different senses:

ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne
sefan to siþe, þam þe swa þenced
on flodwegas feor gewitan.
Swylces geac monað geomran reorde.

(50-53)

[All these urge the eager of spirit, (urge) the heart to a journey, which is so minded to journey far on the floodways. So the cuckoo moans with a sad voice.]

Cnossian and cnyssian are words similar in meaning which echo each other, the former referring to the prow of a ship dashing against a cliff, aet nacan stefnan / þonne he be clifum cnossað (7-8), the latter to the beating of the seafarer's heart as he thinks of the excitement of the sea:

Forþon cnyssað nu
heortan geþohtas, þaet ic hean streamas,
sealtyþa gelac sylf cunnige.

(33-35)

Though Greenfield does not mention the point, there may also be word-play in the phrase maew singende (22), "the sea-gull crying," in the context of the rest of the line, fore medodrince, "in place of mead-drinking" on the word maga, "stomach." There is, at any rate, a penchant for word-play in the poem, which will serve to lead us into a discussion of The Wanderer, where the word-play is more pronounced, and where it is intimately connected with the references to land tenure in the poem. In order to give my land theory a context, I am going to follow the general interpretation of the poem put forth by Isaacs, that the whole thing is a dramatic monologue, without being wholly convinced, at the same time, that the wanderer's mental abberations are the result of a guilty conscience.²

The poem begins with a third-person statement that the anhaga, "the solitary one," looks for are, "mercy" (but more of that later), although he travels with a heavy heart as an exile on the cold sea. Fate is inexorable. Swa cwaed eardstapa, "so says the land-walker," remembering hardships, slaughter, and the death of friendly kinsmen (1-7). There is now a shift from third to first-person narration, in which the follow-

ing is said:³ I have often had to bewail my sorrow before dawn. There is no one living I dare open my mind to. This containing of one's thoughts is considered a noble thing among earls. It is hard for a weary mind to resist fate, for the mind to do much about it, so I have bound up my troubles inside me. Often careworn, deprived of my land, imprisoned far from noble kinsmen, I travel in search of a new lord, since I buried my former lord in the darkness of the earth (8-29). The narration shifts again at this point to the third person. The traditional lot of the exile is expounded: the lack of friends, of gold, of the *duguth*-relationship, the coldness of memory. The exile has a dream in which he is once again with his lord in the hall, but he awakes to find only sea-birds, frost and hail around him. He has a kind of hallucination in which he sees again old kinsmen and hears once more the songs of the hall (30-57). From line 58 to 62 the narration shifts once more into the first person, and there follows a section in which the wanderer looks despairing on the world around him in which the young retainers *flet ofgeafon*, "gave up the hall," and noble warriors die because they have not enough experience in the world (58-65). The next section, which is in the third person, is a collection of gnomic wisdom which follows from the preceding lines in that it is concerned with the wisdom of assessing situations carefully and coolly before acting, a wisdom that only comes with age (65-72); and with the desolation that has resulted from not following these principles: the halls are deserted, the retainers are dead (73-84). God has destroyed the society in this way (85-87). There follows now a section of four lines again in the third person (though the change may be of the same nature as that at line 62, a third-person statement within a first-person narration), concluding with the *acwið* which introduces the formal *ubi sunt* motif of lines 92-110. The final part of the poem summarizes the moral: the wise man does not complain about his grievances, he keeps to his principles, and he puts his faith in God's mercy (*are*), because He is the most powerful Lord of all.

This survey of the literal meaning of the text as I see it is in no way meant to deny a possible allegorical meaning. In fact, an allegorical meaning is likely.⁴ The poem has obvious ties with the *consolatio*

genre, as J. E. Cross has pointed out,⁵ and its message is essentially Christian even if its material is overwhelmingly pagan. But on both the literal level and the allegorical level the concern is the same, a man is contemplating the lot of the exile and offering one solution to his problems. That solution is essentially this: Eall is earfodlic eorþan (106), "All is hardship in the kingdom of earth," so keep your ideas to yourself and put your trust in God, unless you can effect a change by speaking out (113-114), because onwended wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum (107), "the decree of fate changes the world under heaven," but it does not change it in heaven: þær us eal seo faestnung stondeð (115). It is here, in terms of the changing world,⁶ that the clue to the meaning of the poem as a vehicle of land criticism lies, because it contains the centre of contrast between the earthly and heavenly lords, and between the wanderer in his double role as exile from his earthly property and exile from his heavenly property, the one held in laen, the other in boc. An examination of the vocabulary of the poem will bear this out.

The central figure of the poem is an eardstapa (6), a "land-walker." The word, of course, is a figure of speech for an exile, but it is a peculiarly appropriate one in the context of the poem, because it gives rise to a number of other connotative meanings. The first part of the compound, eard, can mean "home, country or region, dwelling place, earth or land in contrast to water, state in life,"⁷ and the second part, which is derived from steppan, "to walk," gives overtones of stepan, "to exalt." Now this compound is thus capable of a complex of meanings even if we ignore the overtone in stepan. It can mean not only an "earth-walker," in contrast to a "sea-walker" or a "heaven-walker," but also "one who walks in a particular region or dwelling place," and "one who walks as a state in life." If we consider the meanings in relation to stepan, we add the idea of exaltation to each of them. So the eardstapa is not only one who walks on the land in his exile, and on many lands, presumably (note his very cold attitude toward the sea, lines 2-4, 23-25, 45f.), but he is also one who appears to exalt the land, and perhaps even to exalt the life of the exile on land in contrast to the exile on the sea.⁸

This interpretation of eardstapa leads both backward to anhaga (10) and forward to anhogan (40). The meaning normally assigned to this word is "solitary one," and it is a meaning which is perfectly acceptable in the context, but one that is far too generalized to bring out much of the basic meaning of the poem.⁹ I should like to suggest that haga has its normal meaning of "dwelling" or "enclosure," that this part of the compound is generally synonymous with eard in eardstapa, and that the prefix an- is an unstressed form of and-¹⁰ "against, opposite, contrary to," giving the compound anhaga (anhogan) the meaning "one who does not possess a dwelling place." The first line of the poem could thus be translated "Often one who does not possess a dwelling place awaits mercy," Oft him anhaga are gebided, which fits in admirably with what follows.

But there is more to the argument than that, and we must now examine the word are (1, 114) to discover its relationship with eardstapa and anhaga, and with the rest of the poem. Ar is normally rendered as "mercy," and there is no question about the fact that the word does have this meaning, but it also has another primary denotative meaning, "a landed estate."¹¹ An outstanding example of its use in this sense is in the section in Beowulf where Wiglaf decides to return to his lord's aid in the dragon fight:

Gemunde ða ða are, þe he him aer forgeaf,
wicstede weligne.

(2606-2607)

[He remembered then the estate which he had formerly given to him, a rich dwelling-place.]

In the context of The Wanderer this meaning, if not the primary one, is at least implied. If a contrast is being made between life on earth and life in heaven, and the patently Christian moral of the poem (111-115) would seem to indicate that this is the case,¹² then the overtone of ar as "estate" is perfectly logical. The man without land on earth often waits for an estate, and he suffers much, because the lack of one turns him into an eardstapa, but the wise man, the snottor on mode, bides his time in such a situation, because he knows that the important thing in life is to seek a heavenly estate rather than an earthly one:

Wel bið þam þe him are seceð,
 frofre to faeder on heofonum, þær us eal
 faestnung stondeð.

(114-115)

[Well it is for him who seeks mercy (an estate), comfort from the father in heaven, where for us, all things are unchangeable.]

The fact that things on earth do not stand fast is amply illustrated in the poem. The wanderer tells us that he has had to bury his lord (22-23), and that since that time he has been an exile, edle bidaeled. The usual translation of this phrase is "deprived of his native land," and it is a perfectly valid translation in the context. But it seems fairly obvious, in the light of other land references in the poem, that there is an overtone here as elsewhere of the deprivation of the wanderer of a particular piece of land.¹³ This overtone is also substantiated by the fact that one's possession of folcland depended on the lord from whom it was received, and there was no guarantee that it would be retained upon the accession of a new lord. That the wanderer goes into exile at the death of his lord would seem to point to the fact that his folcright was rescinded. He is exiled from both his own land and from his native land. This changeableness of earthly prosperity is emphasized by the wasted walls and the dead retainers, and culminates in the ubi sunt passage of lines 92-110.

Other overtones of the wanderer's concern with his land deprivation occur throughout the poem. His lack of foldan blaed (33), "the fertile earth,"¹⁴ is juxtaposed with his lack of wunden gold (32), "twisted gold," the two items that were basic to the lord/retainer relationship. In his description of awakening from his duguth dream at sea he uses the formulaic fealwe wegas (46) to describe the waters, a phrase which is usually translated as "dark waves" or "yellowish-green waves," but which might be better rendered as "fallow waves" in the context, which contrasts the fertile lord/retainer relationship on land with the infertile, wintry, fallow position of the exile at sea. This image of the waves as ploughed land that is unsown is particularly apt.¹⁵ Finally, the wanderer tells us, everything in this world is laene, property, a friend, man and kinsman, and all the framework of this earth becomes useless (108-110).

This passage is obviously meant as a contrast between the earthly kingdom and the heavenly kingdom, where everything is apparently held in boc. The word laene, however, is interesting in a land context because of the association with the compound laenland. It seems likely, if one accepts the land associations in anhaga, eardstapa, edel, foldan, and fealwe, that there is also a reference to land here. That reference may be explicit in Her bið feoh laene, though feoh tends to have a generalized meaning of "possessions" rather than a particular possession or class of possessions, or it may be implied in the eorþan and idel of eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorpeð (110). Whichever is the case (even if neither is the case) the context still allows the possibility of an overtone.

The poem as a whole, then, in this interpretation, may be read as follows: the exile will suffer greatly at the loss of his lord, his land, and his country, but the rigors of exile will teach him (and the lesson is one that young warriors would be wise to learn) that all things on this earth are eventually lost, and it is better to put one's faith in an estate in the kingdom of heaven than to hope for any sort of permanent settlement here on earth. The wise man, and wisdom comes only through experience, does not try to change what cannot be changed. He accepts the world for what it is, and hopes for a better world to come, in the meantime keeping his sadness and disappointment bound up fast in his breost-cofan.

It would appear that The Wanderer is a kind of half-way house that is moving toward the complete acceptance of Christian values which The Seafarer manifests. The wanderer hesitates between the old and the new; the seafarer accepts the new and rejects the old.¹⁶ The wanderer clings not only to the land, but also to the hope of regaining his own piece of land, either on earth or in heaven; the seafarer rejects the land completely. It is all a matter of passive and active trust in the Christian God.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to be sure that what seems to be an allusion to a contemporary problem in an Old English poem is in fact an allusion. I have attempted in this thesis to point out what seem to me to be allusions to problems of land tenure. We know there were problems of land tenure, and we know that these problems were of major importance in Anglo-Saxon society. But our historical sources are limited, and it is difficult at times to separate the genuine from the fake. As for literary sources, we have only the works themselves to go by, and most of these are copies made in the tenth century of what are probably for the most part much earlier works. In an overwhelming majority of the poems, then, we do not know the author, the date of composition, or even the part of the country in which they were composed. So it is very difficult to say with certainty that there is an allusion in a particular poem to an historical situation which occurred at a specific time and in a particular place.

I have suggested that there may be some connection between the references to land tenure problems and the puzzling disappearance of the gesid from the historical scene. It seems likely that a body of men so closely connected with the court would have its troubles dealt with by the scop. But, again, any conclusions must be tentative.

It seems unlikely that a further pursual of this question, in the absence of new and specific evidence, would glean any more definite results. The explicit references to land tenure, of course, speak for themselves. The implicit references, depending as they do on the scop's use of paronomasia — a fact which I feel has been convincingly demonstrated — must remain in the realm of possibility until further work has been done on the connotative aspect of Old English words.

In light of the foregoing, then, I would offer the following tentative conclusions: first, the fall of the gesid was essentially the result of his not gaining a permanent hold over his land; second, this sociological change is reflected in three poems which are basically concerned

with the problem of exile, The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message, and The Wanderer; third, the Anglo-Saxon scop used paronomasia to gain this level of meaning in these poems. Apart from these, which stand "as signals to the land, / Each one a lovely light,"¹ there seems to be little more.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

¹All Beowulf quotations are taken from the Klaeber edition. Other quotations of Anglo-Saxon poetry are from The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. K. Dobbie, except as otherwise stated. Line references are given in the text. All translations into Modern English are my own unless otherwise noted.

²Tacitus, Germania, VII.

³"Gesiths and Thegns," EHR, IV, 1889, 723.

⁴The whole of Beowulf is a record of problems within the comitatus, problems which were balanced by glory, bravery, and generosity. Beowulf's victory over Grendel, for example, is followed by a reminder of the treachery that overtook other Germanic heroes, Heremod and Sigemund (874-915); the fidelity of the retainers at Grendel's mere is contrasted with the infidelity of the retainers in the dragon fight (1591-1605; 2596-2601); the bravery of Beowulf is set beside the jealousy and cowardice of Unferth (499-606), and against his own apparent recklessness in fighting the dragon alone (2529-2537).

⁵Tacitus, XIV.

⁶Dorothy Whitelock, The Audience of Beowulf, passim, deals with the evidence for this dating and finds it inconclusive. Klaeber, arguing that the subject matter is too pro-Danish for the poem to have been written after the end of the eighth century, is basically uncommitted on the question in his discussion, Beowulf, cvii-cxiii, though his preference is for the first half of the eighth century. Chadwick, The Heroic Age, dates the poem slightly earlier than that. Wrenn discusses the evidence put forth by Chadwick and Whitelock in his edition of Beowulf (32-37) and settles on a date "between the early eighth century and its middle."

⁷Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 193.

⁸Ibid., 201.

⁹Ibid., 90.

¹⁰"Letter to Egbert," Opera Historica, II, Trans. J. E. King, 446-489.

¹¹Tacitus, VII.

¹²Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 466.

- ¹³Ibid., 446.
- ¹⁴Brooke, The Saxon and Norman Kings, 68.
- ¹⁵Little, "Gesiths and Thegns," 724.
- ¹⁶Ibid., 725. See Historia Ecclesiastica, III, 21, for an example.
- ¹⁷Note this thegnly function in Beowulf, 494.
- ¹⁸Jolliffe, Constitutional History of Medieval England, 20.
- ¹⁹Ranks 2. Cited by Little, "Gesiths and Thegns," 726-727.
- ²⁰See Beowulf, 2989-2998.
- ²¹See also 2991-2996, where Hygelac gives hund þusenda landes to Wulf and Eofor for killing Ongentheow at Ravenswood, and Widsid, 90-92, where the scop is rewarded for his services.
- ²²"Letter to Egbert," 466, 467. The translation is by Dorothy Whitelock, English Historical Documents, I, 740.
- ²³See Maitland, Domesday Book and Beyond, 230, and Jolliffe, "English Book-right," EHR, L (1935), 5, for a discussion of this point.
- ²⁴Aethelberht I, The Laws of the Earliest English Kings, ed. and trans. F. L. Attenborough, 4, 5. The translation is Attenborough's.
- ²⁵Ibid., Wihtred I, 25.
- ²⁶Tacitus, XXVI. See also Caesar, Gallic Wars, VI, xxii.
- ²⁷Block, Feudal Society, I, 152.
- ²⁸Jolliffe, Constitutional History, 72.
- ²⁹See Wihtred I, 1, Attenborough, Laws, 25.
- ³⁰The alod (alodium) was the nucleus of the freeman's kinship inheritance. The alod custom, then, assured that kin land remained kin land, because it was inheritable only within the kin group. The nucleus of land which belonged to the kin group could not be otherwise alienated.
- ³¹Jolliffe, "English Book-right," 5.
- ³²Vinogradoff, "Folkland," EHR, VIII (1893), 1-17.
- ³³Jolliffe, Constitutional History, 73.
- ³⁴Ibid., 73.

³⁵Anglo-Saxon England, 308.

³⁶Attenborough, Laws, 117.

³⁷Cartularium Saxonicum, II, 100-101.

³⁸Whitelock, ed. English Historical Documents, I, 495-497.

³⁹See Eric John, Orbis Britanniae, 132-150, and Round, "Military Tenure before the Conquest," EHR, XII (1897), 492-494.

⁴⁰Bosworth and Toller, An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, 298.

⁴¹Land Tenure in Early England, 70.

⁴²Cartularium Saxonicum, I, 306.

⁴³Opera Historica, II, 468-471. The translation is a collation of that of King and Whitelock. Bede's vocabulary is interesting in his reference to gesidas and þegnas. He generally (though not always) distinguishes the one from the other by using comes for the former, and minister for the latter. His use of miles seems to be an attempt at a more neutral word, signifying a "warrior," either a gesid or a þegn.

⁴⁴Constitutional History, 14, n.6.

⁴⁵Bede, "Vita Sanctorum Abbatum," Opera Historica, II, 394, 395. See also the reference from Ranks 2 quoted on page eight of this chapter.

Chapter II

¹See Magoun, "Oral Formulaic Characters of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry," Speculum, XXVIII (1953), 446-467, and "Recurring First Elements in Different Nominal Compounds in Beowulf and in the Elder Edda," Kl. Misc., 73-78; also Rankin, "A Study of Kennings in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," JEGP, VIII (1909), 357-422.

²For a more liberal, but still cautious, view, see Brodeur, The Art of Beowulf, 231-233, and Rosier, "The Uses of Association: Hands and Feasts in Beowulf," PMLA, LXXVIII (1963), 8-14.

³Beowulf, lxiv-lxviii.

⁴Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry, 17-18.

⁵Ibid., 41, n.12. Among the examples she cites are: rehte (2106), rehte (2110), and rihte (2110); and gomela (2105) and gomel (2112).

⁶"Six Beowulf Cruces," JEGP, LXII (1963), 120.

⁷"A Method for Determining the Connotations of O. E. Poetic Words," SGG, VI (1964), 85-101.

⁸Grendel the Exile," NM Bd. 67-68 (1966-1967), 375-381.

⁹Ibid., 380.

¹⁰Note, for example, the pun on weax, "wax," and weaxan, "To grow," in Riddle 45. The fact that this word is a pun is pointed out by Baum, Anglo-Saxon Riddles of the Exeter Book, 58. This riddle, which is usually solved by "dough," is obviously solvable as well by "penis."

¹¹This sort of paronomasia is probably intended, for example, in the use of maegburg in Beowulf (2887). This is the only occurrence of the word in the poem (the usual maeg, "kinsmen," is found thirty-four times), so it would seem, with due regard to the context, in which Wiglaf is banishing the cowardly followers of Beowulf, that the word here has the added meaning of "guarantors who vouch before the law" (c.f., Ine, 74,1). Note also in this connection the probable further word play in line 2890 on the word domleasan, "unjust" "lawless = outside the law = exile."

¹²The italics in this and the two examples following are mine.

¹³This example is taken from an article by John O. Beaty, "The Echo-Word in Beowulf with a Note on the Finnsburg Fragment," PMLA, XLIX (June, 1934), 369.

Chapter III

¹John, Land Tenure in Early England, 56-58. It may be this factor which prompts Beowulf to ask Hrodgar to return his armor to Hygelac if he should die:

Onsend Higelace, gif mec hild nime,
beaduscruda betst, þaet mine breost wered
hraegla selest; þaet is Hraedlan laf,
Welandes geweorc.

(452-455)

[Send to Hygelac, if battle takes me away, the best of war-garments, the finest of corslets, that defends my breast; that is the inheritance of Hreðel, the handiwork of Weland.]

²Bosworth and Toller, 610. "laen, II. [in connection with land] a grant that may be recalled, lease, fee, fief."

³This translation and the following one are both from Gordon's Anglo-Saxon Poetry, pages 44 and 69 respectively.

⁴See Chapter V, p.43, for a more thorough examination of this word. The poet's use of paronomasia in the poem is perhaps enforced by the name he gives to his scop. Deor not only means "brave one," but also "wild beast," and it calls to mind as well the adjective deore, "beloved."

Chapter IV

¹Arguments have been put forth from Thorpe's time onward that the poem concerns a man's problems rather than a woman's, but these demand considerable emendation of the first two lines of the text to get rid of the feminine endings on geomorre and minre sylfre, and are consequently not very convincing. For the latest statement of this view see Rudolph Bambas, "Another View of the Old English Wife's Lament," JEGP, LXII (1963), 303-309.

²I have accepted the common editorial emendation of MS hycgende to hycgendne. This emendation is made on the grounds that the word is an accusative masculine adjective which belongs with heardsaeligne, hygegeomorne, and miþendne, and refers to the man as they do.

³See Beowulf, 2130, where leodfruma is used in reference to Hroðgar, who is undoubtedly the overall ruler of the Danes.

⁴See, for example, Stanley Greenfield, "The Wife's Lament Reconsidered," PMLA, LXVIII (1953), 908.

⁵Riddle 29, 10. In religious writings the word is often used for "hermit." Note the use of wracu, "revenge," and the possible implication of double meanings in words such as wraecsiða (5), "a journey of exile" "a journey of revenge."

⁶This phrase has often been emended to her eard or hearg-eard, but it would seem best to retain the MS reading, and look upon heard as a cognate of the Old English hearp, "hearth" in the sense of "home:" cf. German herd. It is also conceivable that heard is used as an adjective in place of a noun, with the meaning "a cruel lot."

⁷There is much variation in the editorial punctuation of this passage. I have followed Krapp and Dobbie except in line 21, where I have accepted the arguments of Leslie and others that the new sentence should begin with ful oft rather than blife gebaero.

⁸See Leslie, ed. Three Old English Elegies, 54-55, where he disagrees with Lawrence's attribution of them to ful gemaecne because "it is difficult to believe that present participles with direct objects postulating action can refer to permanent characteristics," and with Kershaw, who attributes them to gemeacne only.

⁹The expression bitre burgtunas is undoubtedly highly ironic: burgtunas, "protecting hedge" "town-protection."

¹⁰Krapp and Dobbie, Poetic Records, III, 352, say the meaning of leger weardiad is "Live at home."

¹¹Note the use of wicstede in Beowulf, 2607, as the reason for Wiglaf's going to the hero's aid, and compare it with londstede in The Wife's Lament, 16, the place given to her by the overlord. These compounds with -stede and a word referring to the land seem to reflect a kind of ideal domestic bliss, or at least a love of one's own piece of ground, as in the modern "homestead," (O.E. hamstede). If this is the case, then the wife's ahte ic leofra lyt on þissum londstede (16), "I had little love in this land-place," is highly ironic.

¹²Poetic Records, III, 352. There is probably also a word-play here on leger, which often has about it the meaning of "sickness unto death."

¹³The poems are most often dealt with together in critical analyses. There is an obvious thematic connection, but there is no other reason why they should be considered together. They are separated in the MS by a number of folios (115b-123a) which contain completely unrelated material.

¹⁴For the completion of these lines I have followed one of the possibilities put forth by Leslie, Three Old English Elegies, 63. The words chosen are not essential to the argument.

¹⁵See, for example, Beowulf, 2884-2890, in which Wiglaf makes specific reference to the lost of londriht by the retainers he is exiling; and Deor, 38-41.

¹⁶Maxims I, 59. The translation is from Gordon, Anglo-Saxon Poetry, 310.

¹⁷One of the most convincing interpretations of the two poems together is that of M. J. Swanton, "The Wife's Lament and The Husband's Message: A Reconsideration," Anglia, LXXXII (1964), 269-290. In this article he relates the two poems to the leaving of Christ, the Last Days of the World, and the calling of Christ for the soul of the woman, who is the Church Temporal.

Chapter V

¹"Attitudes and Values in The Seafarer," SP, LI(1954), 18-20. See also Ida Gordon, ed. The Seafarer, 7, 26-27, where she specifically examines and agrees with Greenfield's contention that the poet is using

word-play. The italics in the subsequent illustrations on this point are mine.

²Structural Principles in Old English Poetry, 35-55. For other interpretations the following may be consulted: Greenfield, "The Wanderer: A Reconsideration of Theme and Structure," JEGP, L (1951), 451-465; Lawrence, "The Wanderer and The Seafarer," JEGP, IV (1902), 460-480; Pope, "Dramatic Voices in The Wanderer and The Seafarer," in Franciplegius, 164-193; and Rumble, "From Eardstapa to Snottor on mode: The Structural Principle of The Wanderer," MLO, XIX (1958), 225-230.

³This outline of content is not intended to be an exact translation.

⁴See Smithers, "The Meaning of The Seafarer and The Wanderer," MAE, XXII (1957), 137-153, XXVII (1959), 1-22, 99-104.

⁵"On the Genre of The Wanderer," Neophil, XLV (1961), 63-75.

⁶Note the use here of wendan in a context similar to that of Deor, 32.

⁷Bosworth and Toller, 232, Supp., 170. Eard gemunde, "he remembered his home," Beowulf, 1129; Se cyning wolde pone eard mid ealle fordon, "The king wished to go to that country among all," Chronicle, 948; Fundiað aelc gesceaft ðider swiðost, ðider his eard and his haelo swiðost bioð, "every creature chiefly tends thither, where its station, and its health especially is," Boethius, 34, 11.

⁸There is probably similar paronomasia in the word mearcstapa (Beowulf, 103, 1348). Note the contrast made between the mearcstapan and the londbuend (1345) and foldbuende (1355) of this section.

⁹Ida Gordon, "Traditional Themes in The Wanderer and The Seafarer," RES, V (1954), 3, connects the word with hogian, "to think," and translates it as "one who mediates alone," instead of with haga, "enclosure." I would accept this meaning as an overtone.

¹⁰Cf., Quirk and Wrenn, An Old English Grammar, 111-112. Note that anfloga (Seafarer, 62) becomes in this interpretation "the one who goes contrary to," and angenga (Beowulf, 165, 449), "the one who goes against," both meanings most appropriate in their contexts.

¹¹Bosworth and Toller, 47, Supp., 45. Pa hi mostan beon heora þinga and are wurde ðe heom mid unrihte benumen waes, "Then they must be guardians of their things and estates which those were taking away by means of injustice," Chronicle, 1051; see also Beowulf, 2606-2608.

¹²Note also lines 106-107:

Eall is earfoðlic eorþan rice,
onwendeð wyrda gesceaft weoruld under heofonum.

¹³That the word eðel can be used to mean "one's own property" is amply illustrated in Bosworth and Toller, 260, by the phrase ðis is min agen cyð, eard and eðel, where the word cyð denoted the normal meaning of eðel. The meaning "one's own residence or property" is given in this dictionary.

¹⁴This translation is that of Rosier, "The Literal-Figurative Identity of The Wanderer," PMLA, LXXIX (1964), 368. See also my comments on this word in the section on The Husband's Message.

¹⁵The wintry sea that the wanderer travels through is, at least on one level, an image for the experience of life, and it is an effective harbinger of his contention that the young retainers lose their place in the hall through boasting because they do not have his experience (58-65).

¹⁶Dorothy Whitelock, "The Interpretation of The Seafarer," in Essential Articles for the Study of Old English Poetry, ed. Bessinger and Kahrl, 442-457, sees the seafarer as a peregrinus figure.

Conclusion

¹Coleridge, The Ancient Mariner, VI.

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Abbreviations

<u>BJRL:</u>	<u>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</u>
<u>EHR:</u>	<u>English Historical Review</u>
<u>EIC:</u>	<u>Essays in Criticism</u>
<u>HTR:</u>	<u>Harvard Theological Review</u>
<u>JEGP:</u>	<u>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</u>
<u>MLN:</u>	<u>Modern Language Notes</u>
<u>MLQ</u>	<u>Modern Language Quarterly</u>
<u>MP</u>	<u>Modern Philology</u>
<u>Neophil:</u>	<u>Neophilologus</u>
<u>NM</u>	<u>Neophilologische Mitteilungen</u>
<u>PMLA:</u>	<u>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</u>
<u>SGG:</u>	<u>Studia Germanica Gandensia</u>
<u>SP:</u>	<u>Studies in Philology</u>

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